

easy to disbelieve in witches, devoutly
 accepted by Sir
 Thomas Browne a whole century later; or in
 doctors,
 who are for him much in the same category
 as witches;
 he may jettison the Ptolemaic astronomy for
 the Copernican, while perfectly prepared to see, as we
 have seen it,
 the Copernican abandoned in its turn. But
 though his
 mind is so critical and so elastic; though he
 talks often like
 a pagan theist; though Nature is his true
 God; the faith
 of his childhood, I believe, always kept its
 hold on one
 corner of that restless, agile brain.

But Montaigne is not immortal as a sceptic
 who lived
 ingeniously balanced on the hither side of the
 last ditch.
 There were more important and less muddled
 exceptions
 to his scepticism. In religion he might be
 capable, in his
 own phrase, of carrying a candle in one hand
 for St.
 Michael and in the other for the dragon. But
 in his scale
 of moral values, though he saw vividly how
 such things
 vary with years and frontiers, there were
 principles about
 which he never faltered. That marks him off
 from many
 a modern intellectual who regards Montaigne
 as a brother
 in disillusion. He never forgot his hero-
 worship, not less
 real, though better balanced, than Carlyle's,
 for the great
 of antiquity; he never forgot his strong sense
 of what is
 becoming, and what is not, for 'une nature
 bien nfe*.
 Whatever he doubted, he kept his faith in
 sincerity and
 tolerance, in courage and mercy. This faith

was largely
instinctive; he had an aesthetic loathing for
the laideur'
of their opposites. But the man whom no risk
of infection could drive from the bedside of La Boëtie;
who read
and re-read the stoic pages of Seneca; who
admired above
all characters that of Epaminondas and above
all professions that of a soldier, was no more a pure
Epicurean
than a pure Sceptic,
Is there then any unifying principle behind
the beliefs